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February 28, 1978

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
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Dear Josh:

Thank you for your kind letter of February 14. I was, indeed, an early believer in the importance of DNA, so much so that I was trying to convince you at the 1946 Cold Spring Harbor Symposium that your recombination in E. coli is only a transformation. But I have no recollection of the debate with Lwoff or Delbrück on this subject. I don't have any written material on the reception of Avery's discovery in 1944. I only remember that Demerec told me about it in 1944; we were both very intrigued but still cautious. However, in 1946 I was already working (under Chargaff) on isolation of DNA from yeast (which up to that time was believed to contain only RNA ("yeast nucleic acid")); thus, Chargaff and I became early adherents to the glory of DNA. Then, around 1948 our lab obtained chromatographic evidence that DNA is not a tetranucleotide. As you know, Mirsky and all the protein boys were the opponents: to them, in 1948 DNA was still just a prosthetic group.

Please do not hesitate to write to me if I can be of any historical help.

With best regards,

Stephen Zamenhof, Ph.D.
Professor of Microbial
Genetics and Biological
Chemistry

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